

J. Morgan Kousser

Restoring Politics to Political History If history ever was simply the study of past politics, it is no longer. Dissatisfied with narratives of Great Men, more interested in analyzing the impact of larger forces and in tracing out patterns of the lives of the masses of people, skeptical that a recounting of election campaigns and a counting of votes reveals much about social thought or action, strongly affected by currents of opinion which have long run deep in France, American historians have turned increasingly to social history. Others, perhaps those more comfortable with mathematics, have concentrated on economic history. Even most practitioners of the "new political history" have focused chiefly on the effect of social forces on politics or have used votes as a measure of society's opinions. Political history is in danger of becoming a mere branch of social history.¹

Yet this transformation has not gone unchallenged. Although "brought up on the idea that political history was obsolete and out of date," Le Goff, a French historian, contends that politics as the study of power may not be the "backbone of history," but should be its "nucleus." Critical as they are of quantitative studies, moreover, Fox-Genovese and Genovese, who are Marxists, assert that history "is primarily the story of who rides whom and how"

J. Morgan Kousser is Professor of History and Social Science at the California Institute of Technology. He is the author of *The Shaping of Southern Politics* (New Haven, 1974).

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1 Jacques Le Goff, "Is Politics Still the Backbone of History?" in Felix Gilbert and Stephen B. Graubard (ed.), *Historical Studies Today* (New York, 1972), 337-355; Michael Kammen, "Introduction: The Historian's Vocation and the State of the Discipline in the United States," in *idem* (ed.), *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, 1980), 34-35. Lee Benson, *Toward the Scientific Study of History: Selected Essays* (Philadelphia, 1972), 105-159; Samuel P. Hays, "The Social Analysis of American Political History, 1880-1920," *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXX (1965), 373-394.

and insist therefore, that history is an "essentially political process." Nor are social historians alone in their concern for the excluded political dimension. In his recent presidential address to the Economic History Association, Davis warned his colleagues that "if we are to understand economic history we must be able to understand and to explain the behavior of the government sector." And, reflecting the emphasis on theory, which has been such a central part of the training and practice of economic historians, Davis highlights the "potential for successful collaboration between political history and theory."²

Political historians, not yet resigned to the annihilation of political history favored by some social historians, nor relegated to the subordinate roles promoted by the imperialists from social and economic history, have been reshaping and extending their own territory. Paralleling developments in political science, the new agenda for political history now spans the whole political process from the expression of the society's underlying socioeconomic divisions in elections to the formation of policies by elected and appointed officials and the delineation of the consequences of those policies for the society. Historians have also recently laid a good deal of stress on the effect of institutional rules in shaping candidate strategies, electoral results, and policy choices. What is new about these emerging trends in the political history literature is the rediscovery of the importance of electoral rules and the initiation of an effort to connect policy to the behavior of voters and candidates. Since political scientists have been studying these particular problems for much longer than have political historians, what can historians learn from them?³

² Le Goff, "Is Politics Still the Backbone of History?" 337, 349. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, "The Political Crisis of Social History," *Journal of Social History*, X (1976), 219. Distinctions between the various realms of human endeavor are inevitably somewhat arbitrary, and there will always be arguments about the proper classification of activities on various boundaries. In this article I shall concentrate on the comparative effects of two distinct types of influences on the adoption and administration of policies by legal governments—first, such clearly political actions as setting institutional rules, voting, and taking positions on what governing authorities should do; second, such patently socioeconomic factors as a society's economic resources. Lance E. Davis, "It's a Long, Long Road to Tipperary, or Reflections on Organized Violence, Protection Rates, and Related Topics: The New Political History," *Journal of Economic History*, XL (1980), 2, 8.

³ The link between policies and their consequences for the society has rarely been explored systematically by historians, probably because it is so difficult to sort out the

In the Balkanized discipline of political science, practitioners in the two subfields most closely related to the electoral politics-policy link and the problem of institutional rules seldom confront each other. The first field, spatial models of party or candidate competition, is at the extreme abstract or theoretical end of political science, whereas the second, the policy outputs area, is an intellectual continent away, in deepest empiricism.

Although historians are still largely unaware of the existence of spatial models, some have scouted the policy outputs literature. Yet these historians have been too quick to accept the largely deterministic, anti-political orthodoxy propounded by Dye and other political scientists—an orthodoxy which, if accepted by historians, would further subordinate political to social and economic history. McCormick, for instance, recently summarized the opinion of the dominant school of policy analysis that both electoral behavior and policy formation were, in McCormick's words, "fundamentally shaped not by one another but jointly by factors beyond politics" and then took that opinion as a starting point for an overview of nineteenth-century American politics. A review of the subfield of spatial modeling and its relationship to questions of policy outputs, however, will suggest other, more complex insights and will point political history, as Davis has advocated, in the direction of more self-conscious and systematic theorizing.⁴

impact of specific policies from other possible causes. Discovering methods for such sorting should be one of the prime tasks of political history. Allan G. Bogue, "The New Political History in the 1970s," in Kammen (ed.), *Past Before Us*, 251, found that up to mid-1979, most "new political historians" had ignored the interactions between popular voting and policy. The trend is very new. Works exemplifying the trend include Richard L. McCormick, "The Party Period and Public Policy: An Exploratory Hypothesis," *Journal of American History*, LXVI (1979), 279-298; J. Rogers Hollingsworth and Ellen Jane Hollingsworth, *Dimensions in Urban History: Historical and Social Science Perspectives on Middle-Size American Cities* (Madison, 1979). Recent treatments of the effects of institutional rules include Paul Kleppner and Stephen C. Baker, "The Impact of Voter Registration Requirements on Electoral Turnout, 1900-1916," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, VIII (1980), 205-226; Kousser, "Progressivism—For Middle-Class Whites Only"; Peter H. Argersinger, "'A Place On the Ballot': Fusion Politics and Antifusion Laws," *American Historical Review*, LXXXV (1980), 287-306; Gary W. Cox and Kousser, "Turnout and Rural Corruption: New York as a Test Case," *American Journal of Political Science*, XXV (1981), 646-663.

4 McCormick, "Party Period," 292. Although he offers many interesting insights, McCormick too easily accepts the ethnoculturalists' view of certain crucial issues as merely

THE POLICY OUTPUTS LITERATURE, like so much else in political science, begins with Key. In his classic *Southern Politics*, Key combined values, theory, and speculation to make a set of famous and influential remarks:

Politics generally comes down, over the long run, to a conflict between those who have and those who have less. In state politics the crucial issues tend to turn around taxation and expenditure. What level of public education and what levels of other public services shall be maintained? How shall the burden of taxation for their support be distributed? . . . It follows that the grand objective of the haves is obstruction, at least of the haves who take only a short-term view. Organization is not always necessary to obstruct; it is essential, however, for the promotion of a sustained program in behalf of have-nots. . . . It follows, if these propositions are correct, that over the long run the have-nots lose in a disorganized politics.

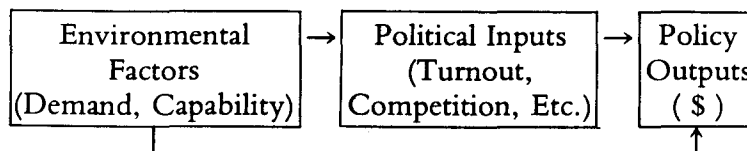
Noting also that the have-nots in the South were often disfranchised by law, practice, or habit, Key concluded that the one-party factionalism of the South in that period produced an "issueless politics," an unhealthy social system, and a starved set of public services for the masses.⁵

In the 1960s, Key's generalizations came under heavy attack, as quantitative comparisons of expenditures and other outputs of government across cities, states, and nations enjoyed a considerable vogue in political science. Lacking a theory of the connections between the individual decisions of the electorate and those of policymakers, the vast majority of the students of policy outputs

symbolic and *The American Voter's* treatment of electors as unideological men whose partisan behavior merely mimicked their fathers'. See Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System, 1853-1892: Parties, Voters, and Political Cultures* (Chapel Hill, 1979), 3-15; Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York, 1964), 86-96; McCormick, "Party Period," 282; Hollingsworth and Hollingsworth *Dimensions in Urban History*, 121. Failing systematically to consider such large issues as slavery, sectionalism, tariffs, and financial policy, McCormick views nineteenth-century American governmental policy as primarily a series of unconnected decisions about how to distribute localized public goods. However useful in reminding historians of an important and too often overlooked set of decisions, McCormick's scheme is not wholly convincing, for it diverts attention from most of the issues that politicians continually discussed.

⁵ V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York, 1949), 307-310.

turned to a misleadingly simple and mechanistic conceptual scheme borrowed from systems analysis. Basically, their framework consisted of labeled black boxes connected with directional arrows, most simply represented like this:



The first studies generally interpreted Key as saying that political inputs produced policy, and showed that that link was spurious, since the simple product-moment correlation coefficients between inputs and outputs across the American states in a post-World War II cross-section went to insignificance when one partialled out the effects of such background variables as per capita income, urbanization, and industrialization.⁶ More recent studies have seemingly settled on path analysis, or non-linear variations of that hierarchical system of regression equations, to make similar findings on city, state, and national data sets. Dependent policy variables have ranged from highway or recreational expenditures per capita to welfare expenditures, indices of policy innovation, measures of the redistributiveness of taxation and expenditure systems, and proxies for the actual impact of various policies. The vast majority of the studies have been cross-sectional and have focused on recent statistics.⁷ Although there have been many dissenters, the basic finding of most studies has been that mass politics makes little difference in policy formation. One recent literature review summed up the findings of the field by claiming that "electoral politics does not control the structure of

6 Thomas R. Dye, *Politics, Economics, and the Public: Policy Outcomes in the American States* (Chicago, 1966), is the leading example.

7 Gary L. Tomkins, "A Causal Model of State Welfare Expenditures," *Journal of Politics*, XXXVII (1975), 392-416; Gerald C. Wright, Jr., "Interparty Competition and State Social Welfare Policy: When a Difference Makes a Difference," *ibid.*, 796-803; Michael S. Lewis-Beck, "The Relative Importance of Socioeconomic and Political Variables for Public Policy," *American Political Science Review*, LXXI (1977), 449-466; Robert Jackman, *Politics and Social Equality: A Comparative Analysis* (New York, 1975). For reference to and summaries of the literature, see Richard I. Hofferbert, "State and Community Policy Studies: A Review of Comparative Input-Output Analyses," *Political Science Annual*, III (1972), 3-72; Dye, *Understanding Public Policy* (Englewood Cliffs, 1972).

expenditures and taxation, legislator voting patterns, or legislative policy.”⁸

There are at least five reasons why historians should hesitate before accepting the elitist and anti-institutional counsel of political despair implied by the policy outputs literature. First, a point which occurs immediately to a historian: nearly all of the studies are time-bound, concentrated in the post-World War II period when the polity and policies of America, and indeed, the developed world, were becoming increasingly centralized and similar. Because of the growing policy emulation and central control across areas, and because of the increasing homogenization of political behavior, there is not a great deal of variance in the dependent variable to be explained, nor much variance in the independent political variables with which to explain anything.⁹

The recency of the data suggests a second point. As the incrementalist school of policy analysis has repeatedly reminded observers, many policy areas have become so bureaucratized in the post-war period that there simply is not enough “play” in these subsystems for electoral politics to have great effects. Bureaucrats do make policy over a large range of well-established programs.¹⁰ Since much of any agency’s budget goes for salaries, and few politicians can really face up to throwing large numbers of government employees out of work, one should not expect

8 Robert R. Alford and Roger Friedland, “Political Participation and Public Policy,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, I (1975), 445. For a similar survey, see Dye and John S. Robey, “‘Politics versus Economics’: Development of the Literature on Policy Determination,” in Dye and Virginia Gray, *The Determinants of Public Policy* (Lexington, Mass., 1980), 3–17.

9 The major exception, Hollingsworth and Hollingsworth, *Dimensions in Urban History*, is based on a sampling design which deliberately cut down the variations in both independent and dependent variables by limiting the data to middle-sized American cities and by pooling data over an eight-year time span.

10 McCormick, “Party Period,” 297; Richard Winters, “Party Control and Policy Change,” *American Journal of Political Science*, XX (1976), 597–636, both stress this point. As Bruce A. Williams has recently emphasized, however, there is no inherent reason to classify bureaucratic behavior as non-political. I do so here only because the distinction is conventional in the literature and because bureaucratic behavior seems usually aimed at making only marginal changes in programs and budgets. A complete theory of the relation of politics to policy would have to include bureaucrats as actors. For suggestive brief introductions on this matter, see Williams, “Organizational Determinants of Policy Change,” in Dye and Gray, *Determinants of Public Policy*, 49–59; Kenneth J. Meier and Kenneth W. Kramer, “Impact of Realignment Elections on Public Bureaucracies,” in Bruce A. Campbell and Richard A. Trilling (eds.), *Realignment in American Politics: Toward a Theory* (Austin, 1980), 202–228.

electoral politics to have a great short-range impact on such programs. Where one should expect an impact is in previously unbureaucratized areas, or in periods before the bureaucratic thicket became so dense. In North Carolina from 1880 to 1901, to take an instance to be more fully developed later in this article, the total state education bureaucracy consisted of an underpaid superintendent and a half-time clerk. Education committees in the legislature turned over almost entirely with every election, which prevented the development of cosy legislative-bureaucratic arrangements. Interest groups of teachers and local administrators were just getting started. In such a simple environment, the translation of political desire into policy could be swift and straightforward.

A third general criticism is that the studies typically use cross-sectional data or data from a relatively short time series. The problem with cross-sectional data is that all geographical units may be subject to the same fundamental trends—for example, inflation or recession may force nearly all governments to follow similar policies at the same time, since at any time they are likely to share a common conventional economic wisdom about cutting or expanding budgets to counteract fluctuations in the economy. Moreover, short developmental sequences may disguise major policy shifts, which often take a fairly long time to effectuate.¹¹

Fourth, the policy output studies have sacrificed specificity for breadth of coverage, and more detailed studies may yield different conclusions. Suppose one found no correlation between party competition or turnout and, say, welfare support levels across time or space. Then it might be correct to conclude that politics made no difference in outcomes. But there are other alternatives. It might be that welfare did not appear prominently on the political agenda, a fact which a closer look at the election campaigns would disclose. If so, there would be no demands to be translated into policy, and the negligible correlation would be easily explained. Or it could be that many voters wished to cut taxes rather than raise welfare levels, or that the cutters and spenders more or less balanced each other out, in which case,

11 Gray, "Models of Comparative State Politics: A Comparison of Cross-Sectional and Time Series Analysis," *American Journal of Political Science*, XX (1976), 235-256, demonstrates that cross-sectional and time-series estimates of the same basic models of policy may yield quite different results.

again, the lack of political and policy correlation should be expected.¹²

The point is that mass demands for policy changes are inadequately represented in the policy outputs literature. Sometimes the socioeconomic background variables are treated as demands, sometimes as merely reflecting the capability of financing policies. More detailed studies and better proxies for demands might change the findings dramatically.¹³

To illustrate the potential importance of close studies, I turn again to late nineteenth-century North Carolina. The correlation across counties between property value per white family and expenditures per white student for seven cross sections from 1880 to 1910 was high enough to swamp the effects of nearly every other independent variable which could be entered into a set of regression equations. Although, at first, one might believe that this finding supported those of the economic determinists in the policy outputs field, a closer look at the laws and constitution of the state would disclose the presence of a law, in effect from 1871 to the 1920s, which set one statewide property tax rate, but directed that all taxes were to be spent in the county where they were collected. Further, a series of state court decisions virtually prohibited local taxation until 1905. The relation between wealth and expenditures, therefore, should be interpreted for this data set as showing not the *weakness* of the effect of political inputs on policy, but the *strength* of that impact. Before 1871, and for a time after 1933, state education revenues were collected centrally and

12 Indeed, when Hollingsworth looked more closely at local electoral contests in three late nineteenth-century Wisconsin towns, he found that campaigns often lasted only a few days and usually only involved issues of personal morality. It is no wonder that he found no connection between turnout and expenditure changes there, for questions of expenditure levels seem, for those times and places, not to have been matters of political conflict. See J. R. Hollingsworth, "The Impact of Electoral Behavior on Public Policy: The Urban Dimension, 1900," in Joel H. Silbey, Bogue, and William H. Flanigan (eds.), *The History of American Electoral Behavior* (Princeton, 1978), 367. R. Kenneth Godwin and W. Bruce Shepard, "Political Processes and Public Expenditures: A Re-examination Based on Theories of Representative Government," *American Political Science Review*, LXX (1976), 1127-1135.

13 Dye, *Policy Analysis: What Governments Do, Why They Do It, and What Difference it Makes* (University, Ala., 1976), 29, 42-43, 60, 71-73. Paul Burstein, "Citizen Preferences, the Party Balance, and Political Outcomes," paper delivered at American Political Science Association meeting (1978). One attempt to operationalize public opinion more precisely is Ronald E. Weber and William R. Shaffer, "Public Opinion and American State Policy-Making," *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, XVI (1972), 683-699.

distributed to the counties in proportion to the number of educable children—a completely egalitarian system. The reactionary Democrats who took control of North Carolina in a Ku Klux Klan *coup d'état* in 1870, however, imposed an inegalitarian system on the state, which lasted for a half-century. The political underpinning of the artificially induced correlation between wealth and spending would be missed by an analyst who merely crunched the quantitative data.¹⁴

A fifth and final criticism of the policy outputs literature is that it lacks any microtheoretical structure. No individual people inhabit its black boxes; no human motives travel its causal arrows; no one, neither leaders nor followers, really acts. To employ systems analysis in social science is to mistake metaphor for theory. Along with its sociological sibling, structural-functionalism, systems analysis in the passive voice of social science.¹⁵

In a recent effort to move beyond the politics vs. economics theme in comparative policy studies, Stonecash has suggested viewing differences in political systems and wealth as “facilitative factors” which affect the process of converting demands into policy, rather than as direct reflections of demands. A move in the direction of more open and sustained competition among elites, the argument goes, should lead to a closer correspondence between public desires and government programs; wealth magnifies the range of options which a public body can adopt, whereas poverty restricts the choice set. Although this seems both a logical step and an interpretation closer than others to Key’s original formulation, it still leaves public opinion and the activities of political entrepreneurs outside the model, public opinion added exogenously, entrepreneurs simply not considered. Since this and other attempts to chart a theory for policy analysis neither satisfactorily explain behavior at the individual level nor explicitly represent the politics of the decision-making apparatus, it is necessary to move beyond the conventional writings in the field to identify some of the implicit assumptions in the comparative outputs literature, to provide a deeper and more complete understanding of some of its findings, and to suggest lines for further

14 For more details, see Kousser, “Progressivism—for Middle-Class Whites Only.”

15 Cf. Hollingsworth and Hollingsworth, *Dimensions in Urban History*, 158.

empirical and theoretical work. One promising direction to take is toward studies of spatial models of party or candidate competition.¹⁶

If policy outputs is a social scientific field characterized by data without theory, spatial models is virtually its inverse—an area of theory without data. Spatial models generally appear in the guise of one-dimensional frequency distributions of public opinion on an issue or set of issues, most familiarly a symmetric unimodal distribution in which two parties compete for the franchises of voters, who decide for whom to vote on the basis of the distance between their preferences and the issue positions of the candidates. The voter's behavior is typically assumed to be governed by a desire to maximize his economic welfare, whereas a candidate takes positions on the issues not because of his own ideological beliefs, but purely from a desire to maximize the votes he receives or the legislative seats his party obtains. The model has a vector representation for multi-dimensional space, and theorems can be rigorously proved by symbolic logic, linear algebra, or game theory. Much of the early work consisted of trying to determine market-like equilibria or core solutions, and the best-known result was that, under certain conditions, both parties converged to the position of the median voter.¹⁷

There are three problems with trying to apply the *formal* results of spatial models to policy analysis. First, the assumptions necessary to derive these results are violated by common observations in political science. For instance, all voters must agree at least roughly on the weights to be attached to each issue and on where each candidate stands; the candidates must take clear issue positions; and voter preferences cannot be changed by experiences during a campaign. Second, even if one suspends disbelief on these assumptions, it can be shown that an equilibrium does not exist if there are more than two candidates or if voters abstain because of alienation—that is, if they decide that neither candidate is sufficiently close to them that it is worthwhile trudging to the

16 Jeff Stonecash, "Politics, Wealth, and Public Policy: The Significance of Political Systems," in Dye and Gray, *Determinants of Public Policy*, 21–37.

17 Harold Hotelling, "Stability in Competition," *The Economic Journal*, XXIX (1929), 41–57; Kenneth J. Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values* (New York, 1951); Duncan Black, *The Theory of Committees and Elections* (Cambridge, 1958); Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York, 1957).

polls. Third, even if equilibria did exist in these interesting and important cases, the elected politicians might not carry out their announced policies, either because the rules of the policy game robbed them of the power to deliver; they were incompetent; they changed their minds once in office; or, most simply, because they had lied during the campaign. As a result of these problems, the most recent work in the field, much of it experimental rather than mathematically deductive, has aimed at developing new and weaker solution concepts which will not absolutely guarantee the adoption of particular policy positions, but will be close enough, as one article has it, "for all practical purposes."¹⁸

We should not conclude that these difficulties render spatial models useless for comprehending policy, for every model necessarily oversimplifies a complex reality and, in certain situations, most of the assumptions may hold approximately true. Most important for present purposes, the underlying ideas of spatial models can profitably be employed in a heuristic fashion to illuminate some of the competing views in the field of policy outputs. That is, the following diagrams can both help us to reflect upon the policy outputs literature and to understand just what assumptions about the behavior of individual electors and policymakers, as well as the effects of institutional arrangements, we are implicitly making when we predict various connections between inputs and outputs.

Figure 1 is an attempt to turn Key's verbal model into a geometric spatial model. The horizontal axis here, and in subsequent figures, indexes the level of redistribution of private goods desired by each voter, and the vertical, the proportion of voters whose ideal point falls at any particular place on the one-dimensional left-right continuum. There are no restrictions on voting, there is two-party competition, and both parties are assumed to keep their promises. The distribution of opinion is bimodal, and the left mode is higher than the right because there are more have-

¹⁸ The best introduction to recent findings on these issues raised by the first problem is Benjamin I. Page, *Choices and Echoes in Presidential Elections: Rational Man and Electoral Democracy* (Chicago, 1978). Otto A. Davis, Melvin J. Hinich, and Peter C. Ordeshook, "An Expository Development of a Mathematical Model of the Electoral Process," *American Political Science Review*, LXIV (1970), 426-448. John A. Ferejohn, Morris P. Fiorina, and Herbert A. Weisberg, "Toward a Theory of Legislative Decision," in Ordeshook (ed.), *Game Theory and Political Science* (New York, 1978), 183, is the source of the quotation.

Fig. 1 Key Geometrized—A First Cut

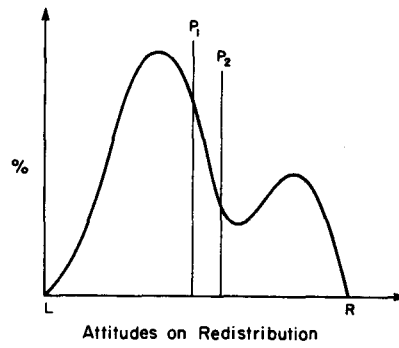


Fig. 2 Left Promises, Right Performance

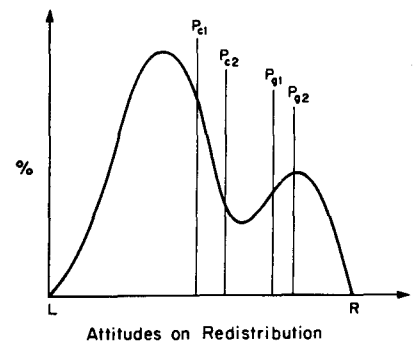


Fig. 3 Disfranchisement and Discontinuity

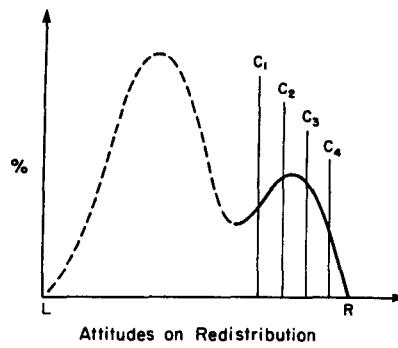
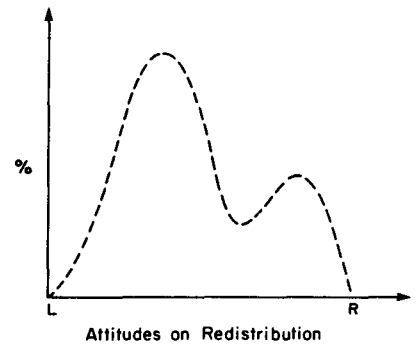


Fig. 4 Public Opinion and Policy Disconnected



nots than haves. Allowing voters to abstain either because of alienation or indifference, and assuming away the problems of incomplete or fuzzy information, poorly behaved preference functions, and disagreement on issue weighting, one intuitively expects to observe the two parties both taking issue positions close to the mean or median, say, at P_1 and P_2 . The governmental policies adopted should thus be fairly redistributive, as Key predicted.

Reflection on this example suggests three observations. For the median result to hold, it must be assumed that all issues which have marked redistributive overtones can be collapsed into one dimension. Taxation and expenditure decisions must be made simultaneously; otherwise, it would be perfectly reasonable, for example, for a voter who, *ceteris paribus*, prefers more spending on welfare, but who is presented with a regressive and unchangeable tax system, to vote against a candidate who agrees with him on welfare but who feels that the existing structure of taxation cannot be amended, at least in the immediate future.¹⁹ Furthermore, a voter who prefers redistributive expenditures on welfare must not, if the median result is to hold for all subject areas, prefer a non-distributive pattern of educational spending; if he holds these two positions simultaneously, the analyst must disentangle the issues from each other, and such disentanglement may confuse the relationship of each issue to the progressivity of the tax system.

Second, the result might not hold if many voters perceived the issue complex as not salient, or if they were too attached to a party or a candidate for these issues to make much difference. Third, this model assumes honest and competent parties. Suppose, for instance, that the competing elites shared certain ideological presuppositions, or all craved approval from the upper classes, or all sought to raise campaign funds from people whose ideal points fell in the right-hand mode by satisfying the donors' policy desires. Or suppose that even if elected officials attempted

19 This is not a strained example. Consider the difficulty of shifting the financing of social security from the regressive payroll tax to the income tax or, in many states, of replacing regressive sales taxes with more progressive taxes on income or wealth as the primary means of financing state contributions to education. An attempt to overcome this difficulty by excluding services financed through regressive taxes excludes too much policy. See Christopher Hewitt, "The Effect of Political Democracy and Social Equality on Equality in Industrial Societies: A Cross-National Comparison," *American Sociological Review*, XLII (1977), 450-464.

to carry out a policy, wily opponents or bureaucrats manipulated the rules to prevent them from doing so, or that the governing politicians were honorable, but simply inept. Then Figure 1 might turn into Figure 2, where the C's subscript the politicians' campaign promises and the G's, the policies actually adopted when they formed a government. If the true experience is represented by Figure 2, which might aptly summarize the situation in parts of the United States just before the rise of the Populists or that in Great Britain when the Labour Party was in its infancy, then one would expect one of several things to occur: the rise of a leftist Party; a takeover of one of the two parties by a leftist—such as George McGovern in 1972; an attempt to exclude leftist parties from competing—as in the Red Scares of 1918–1920 or the late 1940s in America; or a change in the institutional rules—such as David Lloyd George's threat to pack the House of Lords or Franklin D. Roosevelt's to pack the Supreme Court; or the replacement of a bumbling leader, such as Jimmy Carter. In the first two cases at least, the polity would probably eventually return to policies which pleased the median voter, but there could be a considerable time lag, and a cross-sectional study taken during the lag might well conclude that there was no relation between competition and outputs. Since one way that the lower class could collectively guarantee that there was no divergence between promises and policy would be to select as leaders only those who were ideologically committed to the class' goals, a socialist party might be their best guarantee of a continuation of redistributive policies.

Although Key sometimes spoke of parties as sets of competing elites interested only in maximizing pluralities, as the spatial modelers also assume, he hinted from time to time that he believed the "have-nots" needed a genuinely lower-class party in order to sustain a redistributive program. (Since he did not make the point explicit, he never had to come to grips with Michels.) Perhaps it was the unkept promises point which led Key to mix his "elite competition" and "lower-class party" notions. In any case, the two variants would lead to quite different predictions about the relations between political inputs and outputs. If the proletariat can trust its leaders, party competition and substantial lower-class turnout may, other things being equal, lead to redistribution. If leaders cannot or will not keep their pledges, then

redistribution will be likely to occur only if the lower class provides its own leadership—and then watches its every move.²⁰

Key probably would have modeled the 1900–1950 southern political system as in Figure 3, where the dotted lines indicate the disfranchised voters and there is so little continuity from election to election in factional lineups in the multi-candidate Democratic primaries that one cannot really tell where each candidate will fall or how many candidates there will be. Since a candidate who promised a major extension of services for the disfranchised, such as for most blacks in the South from 1900 to about 1950, could expect swift retaliation by the voters, the policies advocated would fall in the right-hand hump. But since factionalism, at least in the early twentieth-century South, was fluid and since there could be multiple candidates, the winner could choose a platform anywhere on that mode. And because the lack of factional continuity from election to election would decrease the voters' ability to punish candidates who failed to keep their promises, the policies eventually adopted might well stray far from the promises made, perhaps even meandering into the left half of the redistribution scale. As a consequence, one should expect that a shift from a Figure 1 to a Figure 3 polity would, other things being equal, not only decrease the redistributiveness of the policies adopted, but also pronouncedly increase the amount of variance in those policies.

Figure 4 represents a political system with the same distribution of opinion on issues of redistribution as Key hypothesized, and no restrictions on voting, but where the number of parties or candidates is indeterminant and the policies eventually adopted could fall anywhere on the line. The curves are dotted to reflect that, in this case, public opinion and policy are disconnected. This graph might represent any of four situations. First, the issue might not be salient in voter decisions, perhaps because of a general belief that government should not intervene on behalf of any particular class. McCormick has argued that such an ideology pervaded late nineteenth-century America and hampered impulses

20 Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York, 1962; reprint of 1915 ed.). For a suggestive use of the "lower-class party" variant of Key, see Edward T. Jennings, Jr., "Competition, Constituencies, and Welfare Policies in American States," *American Political Science Review*, LXXIII (1979), 414–429.

toward governmental activism. Thus, on the line of redistribution the coordinate of the policy adopted would be an unintended consequence of stands taken on other issues.²¹

Second, there might be multi-candidate competition, in which case any candidate placing himself, say, on the left mode could always be outflanked on both sides, and, therefore, since no particular strategy would insure success, the policy espoused by the winner could lie virtually anywhere along the line. The same effect could be achieved in a two-party state if each voter were to observe the candidates' positions closely and abstain even if only slightly displeased with the stand that the politicians whose views were closest to his took. The French Fourth Republic may roughly have approximated the former case, and Hubert Humphrey's fate in the 1968 presidential election is at least popularly attributed to massive abstention because of the alienation of the left on the Vietnam war issue.²²

Third, open competition might not be allowed, as in Communist countries, and the policies would be determined by other factors. If the party in power were ideologically committed to leftist policies, as most Communist parties are, the policies would generally be leftist or, if the party were of the opposite ideological persuasion, as is the Chilean junta, for instance, the policies would be rightist. This observation shows that party competition is not a necessary prerequisite of redistributive policies and explains the finding of some cross-national studies that Communist and non-Communist countries have adopted similar welfare policies; but it suggests also that the variance in policies adopted by Figure 4 polities should be greater than those of Figure 1 countries.²³

Fourth, suppose that for some reason, perhaps one of those just enumerated, bureaucrats or interest groups rather than voter-oriented politicians made the crucial policy decisions. Then, regardless of the distribution of public opinion or the amount of turnout or the nature of party competition, the policies could fall anywhere on the line. Policy would then vary with the tastes of bureaucrats or the comparative strength of various interest

²¹ McCormick, "Party Period," 291-292.

²² Downs, *Economic Theory*, 142-163.

²³ For cross-national studies, see Jackman, *Politics and Social Equality*; Harold L. Wilensky, *The Welfare State and Equality: Structural and Ideological Roots of Public Expenditures* (Berkeley, 1975).

groups, and one would expect, for example, that a disproportionate rise in labor union strength would cause a polity to shift to the left, whereas a similar growth of organization among big businesses would signal a rightward trend.²⁴ The growth of the bureaucratic state, however, would *shield* policy determination from public opinion, a consideration which implies that one should search for direct connections between electoral politics and policies in areas where bureaucratic domination is weakest, where functionaries have the least independent power, or at a time before they became entrenched.

Although the informal discussion of bimodal models has suggested explanations for various findings in the policy outputs literature and prescriptions for future studies, one should not hastily assume a bimodal distribution of public opinion. After all, one of the problems with policy output studies noted earlier is that in most cases there are no direct measures of demands. What if the distribution were unimodal? Figure 5 represents the most-studied case in spatial modeling, a symmetric unimodal distribution in which two-party competition drives both parties to adopt the position of the median voter. To partisans of Barry Goldwater in 1964 and George Wallace in 1968, this diagram aptly described American national politics.

However, suppose that, because of historic party identification or some other reason, one of the parties was too weak to pose a real threat to the other. Then the majority party could take any position on the line, although a risk-averse party might feel constrained not to wander too far from the median, as indicated by the dashed lines in Figure 6. The risk-averse majority (P_{MR}) locates between the dashed lines, whereas the gambling parties (P_{GL} and P_{GR}) take the positions to the left and right of the spectrum. Figure 6 might well fit American states or Congressional districts in which one party has remained dominant for a long period, and the incentive for the minority to gamble in such circumstances might account for the recurrent anomaly in recent United States politics of Democrats "leap-frogging" entrenched Republicans and taking more rightist stances than GOP incumbents, and, conversely, Republicans challenging Democratic

24 Alexander Hicks, Friedland, and Edwin Johnson, "Class Power and State Policy: The Case of Large Business Corporations, Labor Unions, and Governmental Redistribution in the American States," *American Sociological Review*, XLIII (1978), 302-315.

Fig. 5 Only the Center Can Hold

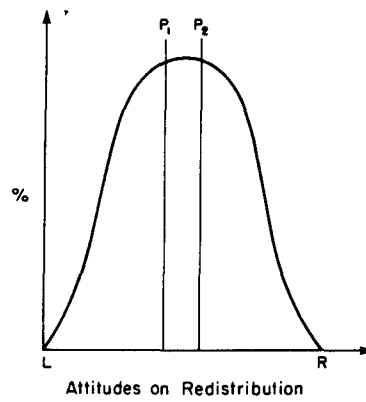


Fig. 6 A Dominant-Party State

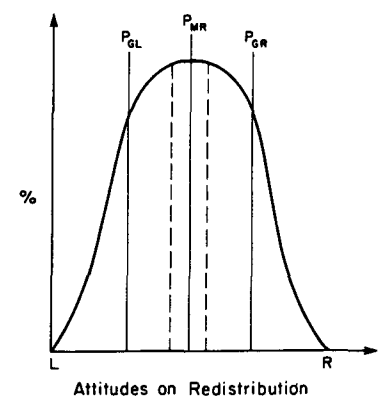


Fig. 7 Disfranchisement and the Single Mode

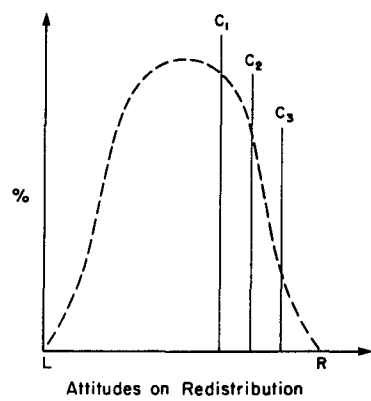
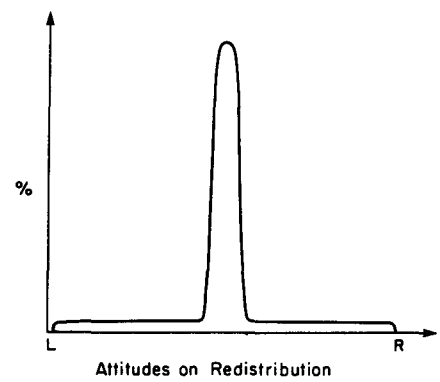


Fig. 8 The Consensual State



placeholders from the left. If we compared Figure 5 to Figure 6 polities, they would adopt fairly similar policies on the average, but there would probably be much more dispersion in the choices of the latter than the former.²⁵

Consider further a shift from Figure 5 to Figure 7, which, paralleling the change from Figure 1 to Figure 3, represents the disfranchisement of the lower classes and the ending of organized party competition. As in the earlier discussion, one would expect the policies adopted by the regimes after the change to be both less redistributive, although perhaps not as much less as in the bimodal case, and less predictable than those of the administrations before the change.

But suppose an analyst found that policies did not vary systematically across systems which diverged widely on measures of turnout or competition. Then either we would be back in the unstable case of Figure 2, or the more stable one of Figure 4, allowing unimodal distributions with side conditions analogous to the bimodal case in each, or we would have to hypothesize a set of much narrower, more sharply peaked distributions, one of which is represented in Figure 8. For it is two-party competition which drives policy to the center in Figures 1 and 5; without that competition, societies with bimodal or broad unimodal distributions would almost certainly experience greater policy variance, as in Figures 3, 6, or 7. Only with a distribution like Figure 8 would one expect all candidates to bunch around the modal point regardless of the degree of competition or the number of candidates.

Distributions such as Figure 8 appear to capture what members of the social determinist school of policy outputs have in mind when they consider socioeconomic variables as indicators of demands, instead of resource availability. In other words, these scholars implicitly view all or at least the vast majority of citizens as having identical preference functions. If their contentions can be extended to issues of redistribution, which they are somewhat loathe to do, the implication is that each type of society is char-

25 The effect of risk aversion on spatial choice has been studied under somewhat different conditions by Kenneth A. Schepsle, "The Strategy of Ambiguity: Uncertainty and Electoral Competition," *American Political Science Review*, LXVI (1972), 555-568; Richard D. McKelvey, "Some Strategic Aspects of Ambiguity in Spatial Models of Policy Formation," *Public Choice*, XXXV (1980), 385-402.

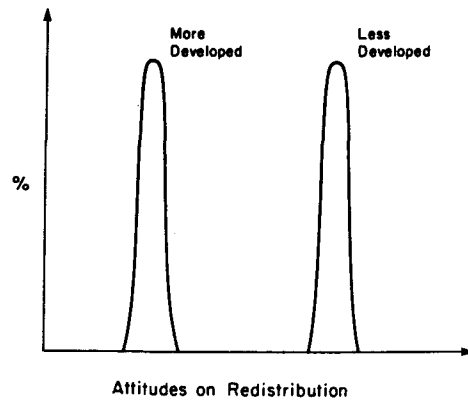
acterized by a firm policy consensus.²⁶ Less developed states or countries have either less taste for redistributive policies than their more fortunate counterparts, or are less able to indulge their desires. If the contrast in policies adopted is determined largely by such differences in tastes, then Figure 9 might adequately represent public opinion in two polar cases. In each of the two states, which appear on the same graph for convenience, the public overwhelmingly agrees on policies, and any candidate would be irrational to stray to a position on the line not under the closed umbrella of consensus. If a polity in which opinion was distributed as in Figure 8 disfranchised a segment of the populace or ended party competition, policy would not change, for only the height of the mode would diminish.²⁷

All nine of the figures presented probably apply to some issues in some locations at some times, as the examples discussed along with each suggest. The problem is that since the analyst often lacks direct measures of demand, not to mention an appropriate metric, he can seldom apply any one of them with perfect confidence. He should, however, try to step back and consider which might be most appropriate in a given circumstance, and,

26 Dye, *Understanding Public Policy*, 262.

27 There are interesting parallels between the clashes among students of policy outputs in political science and the arguments over consensus interpretations of American history during the 1960s. Many on the political left as well as the right in political science agree that "politics doesn't make a difference" in capitalist bureaucratic states, just as many leftist historians join their right-wing colleagues in the belief that consensus rather than conflict has characterized the history of American politics. (Surely Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism* [New York, 1963] is as much a work of consensus history as any of the books by Richard Hofstadter.) In each case, liberals and moderate leftists have stood fast in the belief that the "democratic class struggle" has often found expression in politics—that, at least under certain conditions or in certain instances, the lower class could express and obtain its will through normal political channels. The correlation of both debates with ideological world views, and especially the fact that the "equations" for positions on the consensus-conflict dependent variable, to allow a fanciful regression equation, are dominated by a quadratic term—that is, both ideological extremes share a consensus on consensus, whereas the centrists are more likely to see conflict—indicates the unlikelihood of resolving either debate. True believers will explain away evidence. And even a general exogenous shift of opinion toward one end of the political spectrum, which might settle simpler controversies by decimating one side's adherents, will not resolve these battles. In these cases, a leftward or rightward shift will change the balance between leftist and rightist adherents of consensus or social determinism, but it will not eliminate the devotees of conflict and pluralism in the center, or change very much the overall strength of the extremes against the middle. Thus, those who plan their careers by playing the futures market of intellectual interchange can safely invest in the continuation of both of these conflicts.

Fig. 9 Left and Right Consensuses



if he can come to no conclusion by mere logic, attempt to determine how he can go about testing one against the other in any particular situation. The attractiveness of Key's models (Figs. 1-3) is that they follow from the assumption of rational self-interest on the part of voters and politicians and his observation of a markedly skewed income distribution. If the horizontal axis were changed to another group of issues, it might be more difficult to specify the assumptions required to produce a particular distribution of opinion or set of political combatants. If, after considerable thought on the part of the data analyst, no distributions or strategies were to appear more likely than any others, that very fact may imply that it would be unreasonable to expect to observe a connection between policies and the political process on such a set of issues. Even in the case in which none of the models fits, the exercise should at least stimulate clearer thinking by forcing the observer to be more self-conscious about the appropriateness of his assumptions and about the applicability of the various simplifying devices to particular cases.

To illustrate how the preceding observations about the policy outputs and spatial modeling literature might be applied to a historical topic, let us consider the development of education in the southern United States from 1880 to 1910. A study of that development should overcome six problems of previous analyses of policy outputs. First, the *direct* effects of educational benefits,

unlike, for example, many of the direct effects of highways, recreational expenditures, or national defense, are relatively easily divisible and easily assignable to particular persons or groups. It makes sense to talk about the distribution of the benefits of educational spending; whereas, it is much more difficult to divide the shares of purer public goods.

Second, the distributional issue, although of varying importance from campaign to campaign, was clearly central throughout the period. When Radical Republican governments assumed power during Reconstruction, practically the first thing that they did was to set up public school systems; and both their educational programs and rhetoric were suffused with egalitarian sentiments. When Redeemer governments, dominated by wealthy Democrats, and often, as in Texas and Mississippi, spearheaded by tax-cutting movements, took over from the Radicals, they reduced general spending levels for education, thereby punishing most of those who could not afford private schools. In other states, such as North Carolina, the Redeemers combined overall spending cuts and tax limitations with decentralization of finance and control, thereby mandating malapportionment of schooling. The movements at the beginning of the century for increased local taxation, and legislative acts which enabled the multiplication of special taxing districts that segregated wealthy from poor areas were self-consciously elitist, and succeeded only over the repeated and vehement protests of those who wished to spread educational opportunity equally. Specific facts aside, education, which consumed 30 to 50 percent of southern state budgets, and was widely believed around the turn of the century to be the key to societal progress and equality of opportunity, was an issue which must have been extremely salient to most voters.²⁸

²⁸ W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York, 1936), 637-669. Dudley G. Wooten, "The Reconstruction Period, 1865-1874," in Eugene C. Barker (ed.), *Texas History* (Dallas, 1929), 506-513; William C. Harris, *The Day of the Carpetbagger: Republican Reconstruction in Mississippi* (Baton Rouge, 1979), 624-628; Horace Mann Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* (Englewood Cliffs, 1934), 92, 105-108. The best places to start to trace the centralization, decentralization, and equality arguments are in the periodic reports of state school superintendents. See especially those of South Carolina (1881-1882, 631-632; 1899, 21-22; 1900, 28-29, 32; 1902, 15; 1904, 13; 1910, 12); Mississippi (1872, 19-20; 1904, 11); Alabama (1908, 118-119).

Third, the issue is one for which a calculus of simple self-interest seems appropriate. From time to time public policy analysts have tried to match public opinion and policy on such issues as lotteries or the death penalty.²⁹ These studies may be possible when one has adequate survey data, but scientific surveys only began in 1935, and few analysts can hope to make use of an extended time series of surveys on important policy issues, at least below the national level. In such cases, one is forced to hypothesize about the shape of public opinion on an issue, subject to whatever approximate tests of the assumptions are available, and it is therefore helpful to choose policy areas in which relatively simple hypotheses seem adequate.

Fourth, by concentrating on the period from 1880 to 1910, one escapes the homogenized world of the present, and has a long enough time series to observe major alterations in policy. The period largely precedes the development of potent bureaucracies and scholastic interest groups, at least in the South, and one may therefore avoid having to disentangle the impact of these groups on policy.

Fifth, the data set—essentially all of the counties of the eleven ex-Confederate states, with the statistics often separated by race—is large and diverse enough to provide an adequate amount of variance in both potential independent and dependent variables. The general topic is also small enough and the secondary literature rich enough to enable a diligent researcher to uncover many crucial details which someone studying, say, all countries in the developed world, could miss.

Finally, there are three ways roughly to determine the shape of public opinion on the issue. Models of individual behavior are therefore possible, at least in principle. First, there are a few statewide referenda on distribution-related issues. In 1882, for instance, Kentucky, which did not really secede, but which has always been at least “romantically” southern, held a referendum on whether to increase the white property tax rate by 10 percent in order to triple school expenditures for blacks, thereby equalizing state-level expenditures for both races. The correlates of voting patterns on this proposal indicate a good deal about the

29 For example, Weber and Shaffer, “Public Opinion and American State Policy-Making.”

opinions on black education of voters with various characteristics.³⁰

A second way to approximate demand is to look at variations in local tax rates. Those areas which had higher tax rates must have been willing to pay a larger proportion of their incomes for the education of their children than those in low-tax areas, other things being equal. If the taxes were highest where the people were poorest, which was overwhelmingly the case in North Carolina, for instance, then it is but a short step to conclude that the poor, black and white, had a strong demand for redistribution through taxes and spending, whereas the wealthy, nearly all white, were content to finance their own schools at their current low tax rates without increasing their subsidy to the children of the less fortunate.³¹

A third way to learn something about opinion on redistribution is to look at the actions of state legislators in key sessions. In 1870 in North Carolina, for instance, legislators from rich counties generally supported the shift from a statewide to a county-wide collection and disbursement of funds. In 1883 in North Carolina, in 1886 in Alabama, and at other times in other states, legislatures passed laws allowing local school boards to discriminate against blacks in the allocation of funds within counties or districts. Although these cases have not yet been studied in detail, their analysis should reveal a good deal about attitudes toward inequality of educational opportunity for blacks.³²

A related issue considered by several southern legislators and constitutional conventions suggests one measure for the distribution of educational benefits. In the late 1860s and early 1870s, and again after blacks were substantially disfranchised about 1900, there were widespread calls, especially from wealthy white Democrats, for the passage of laws or constitutional amendments denying funds raised from taxes on whites to go to black education. Since blacks were almost all poor, confining their schools to the relative pittance which could be raised from taxes on blacks meant consigning their schools to severe and permanent inferi-

30 Kousser, "Making Separate Equal: Integration of Black and White School Funds in Kentucky," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, X (1980), 339-428.

31 Kousser, "Progressivism—for Middle-Class Whites Only," 176, 191.

32 Bond, *Education of the Negro*, 107-109.

ority. Because such blatant discrimination might have inflamed northern public opinion, or have been invalidated by the courts, and because less obvious, but equally effective means of discrimination existed, none of these laws passed.

The proposals inspired an index of racial discrimination over time which might be called the "black balance of payments." For a few states where data on taxes and spending are available by color for the whole period, one can determine the proportion of expenditures which went to blacks and the proportion of direct taxes paid by blacks. The statewide trends for North Carolina are presented in Table 1, which is based on data collected for each of the thirty years and averaged over five-year periods in order to equalize the numbers of observations for each period and to smooth out the impact of nonrecurring expenses for school construction.³³

The trend in the table is clear enough. The level of the white subsidy to black education was roughly constant from 1880 to 1900, when the state passed a law which disfranchised at least 95 percent of the blacks. The subsidy immediately dropped to about half of the pre-1900 level, and fell off by another 20-25 percent in the last part of the period. A shift from a Figure 1 to Figure 3 polity appears to have occurred, and the connection between electoral and policy changes seems strong.

Even more interesting is the alteration in the correlates of the black balance of payments over time. Table 2 presents ordinary least squares regression coefficients for county-level data in North Carolina. A wide assortment of variables was initially included in

Table 1 Statewide Trends in the "Black Balance of Payments," 1880-1910

PERIOD	BALANCE ^a	PERIOD	BALANCE ^a
1880-1884	.205	1896-1900	.189
1886-1890	.177	1901-1905	.097
1891-1895	.174	1906-1910	.057

a Black proportion of expenditures minus black proportion of property and poll taxes.

33 Indirect taxes accounted for only about 12% of total school expenditures and there was no clear trend in the proportion of support from such sources.

Table 2 The Shifting Correlates of the Black Balance of Payments—
Multiple Regression Statistics

PERIOD	PERCENT NEGRO	PERCENT NEGRO ²	WHITE WEALTH (IN \$1000)	CONSTANT	R ²
1880–1884	+0.54 ^a	−0.33 ^a	+0.05 ^a	−.02	.86 ^a
1885–1890	+1.02 ^a	−1.15 ^a	+0.02	−.04	.75 ^a
1891–1895	+0.85 ^a	−0.87 ^a	+0.02	−.02	.74 ^a
1896–1900	+0.85 ^a	−0.85 ^a	+0.01	−.02	.69 ^a
1901–1905	+0.32 ^a	−0.40 ^a	+0.09	−.04	.53 ^a
1906–1910	−0.08	−0.01	+0.06	+0.01	.11

a These numbers are significant at the .05 level.

the regression equations, and I eliminated those which had no significant coefficients. Removal of the extraneous terms left the remaining parameter estimates virtually unaffected. The pattern of coefficients for the percentage Negro variable is the most striking facet of the table: it is strongly positive.

While blacks enjoyed the vote, they were apparently able to use their political power to extract a larger subsidy from whites in counties where there were a great many black votes, despite the fact that it was precisely in those counties where white racism and the plantation economy's hierarchic socioeconomic structure were strongest. After disfranchisement, black votes lost their value as currency negotiable for government benefits.

It is unlikely that this marked distributional shift merely reflected some underlying socioeconomic upheaval, for, first, the correlation between the black payments account and the wealth per white male adult stayed fairly constant and insignificant through the era. Second, the economy improved markedly after 1900. The statewide value of real and personal property per white male adult, which had varied from \$875 in the early 1880s to \$798 in the still depressed late 1890s, jumped to \$904 and \$1,094 in the last two periods. The 37 percent rise in property value in a decade meant that the state was capable of distributing a larger amount to its poor after 1900 than before; instead, it gave a markedly lower percentage of available funds to blacks, which decreased the relative standing of black vis-à-vis white schools, and therefore made the black opportunity to progress through schooling increasingly unequal. And the perfect correlation over time be-

tween disfranchisement and the diminution of the black balance of payments strongly suggests that politics made all the difference.

Although it would be possible to present further numbers making essentially the same point through different means, the major conclusions are clear. In turn-of-the-century southern education, Figures 1 and 3—not Figures 8 and 9, which best represent the Dye dogma—sketch the before and after pictures pretty well. The decisive factor was the shift in the distribution of expenditures and taxes from one which favored blacks to one which left them approximately as badly off as they were under the non-governmental, socioeconomic status quo.³⁴

The example from educational policy in the South demonstrates concretely what the review of the two political science subfields asserted: historians should not uncritically accept and apply the findings, methods, and conceptual frameworks of the dominant school of policy outputs studies. Rather, if historians ground their investigations firmly in theories of individual behavior, choose data sets carefully, and combine meticulous studies of the relevant events and institutional environment with quantitative analyses, they have the opportunity to make a unique and original contribution to the study of policy by helping to specify the conditions under which mass politics will make a greater or lesser difference in policy. Such a deeper understanding should lead to the construction of more fully articulated and complex models of the process of policymaking in different areas at different times and should strengthen the relationship between sophisticated techniques and sophisticated theory. Since a comprehensive view will give the choices of voters, institutional rules, and candidate and bureaucratic strategies a prominent place in the theoretical structure, historians who play a role in creating that structure will at the same time be restoring politics to the central place it deserves in political history.

34 For an expanded discussion of the case sketched out here see Kousser, "Progressivism—For Middle-Class Whites Only." Hollingsworth and Hollingsworth, *Dimensions in Urban History*, 145, draw similar conclusions about the relation of turnout to educational expenditures in the turn-of-the-century South.